

BOSTON GLOBE  
7 November 1985

# Yurchenko's re-defection raises interesting theories

By Fred Kaplan  
Globe Staff

WASHINGTON — The case of Vitaly Yurchenko, the Soviet defector who reversed himself and returned to the Soviet Union yesterday, raises several questions.

How did Yurchenko, the 5th highest-ranking official in the KGB and thus a valuable intelligence asset, elude his CIA escorts? Why did he re-defect to the Soviet Union? Was his initial defection to the West genuine, or was it the first step of an elaborate deception by the KGB? And if the latter, what might have motivated such an operation?

Yurchenko defected to the US embassy in Rome last July. In September, he reportedly revealed details about Soviet spying to the CIA. On Monday, Yurchenko surprised the US intelligence community by appearing at the Soviet embassy here and claiming that he had not defected voluntarily, that the CIA had kidnapped, drugged and tortured him.

The State Department has called Yurchenko's story "completely false."

How Yurchenko escaped his CIA supervisors is not yet clear. Monday, Yurchenko said he had been kept in total isolation and had broke away during a "a momentary lapse" in security.

On the other hand, intelligence officials have said Yurchenko was dining with his CIA escort at a restaurant in Washington's Georgetown section Saturday night, got up, said he would return shortly, and disappeared.

## Conversation reported

[ABC News yesterday reported that Yurchenko asked his dining companion: "What would you do if I walked out? Would you shoot me?"

["No, of course not," the CIA escort reportedly said. "We don't treat defectors that way."

[Yurchenko departed, reportedly saying, "If I'm not back in 15 minutes, don't blame yourself."]

Legislators have criticized the CIA for keeping loose reins on such a heavyweight find. However, his easy escape is neither implausible nor inconsistent with agency practices. Several Soviet defectors have been allowed out of isolation a short time after their case officers deemed them genuine and reliable.

Says former CIA director William Colby, "You really have to begin treating the guy like a normal person. You can't keep him in prison. There are very clear rules on this."

In fact, the rules resulted from the case of Yuri Nosenko, another senior KGB official who defected to the West in 1962. Because some of Nosenko's information conflicted with that of a previous KGB defector, and because the previous defector was much favored by senior CIA

counterintelligence officers, Nosenko was kept in isolation for 3½ years and repeatedly questioned by interrogators who suspected he had been sent by Moscow to purvey disinformation. Even under this pressure, Nosenko never changed his story, and was finally released.

In the mid-1970s, the case was reviewed, interrogation procedures were changed, and several counterintelligence officers were fired.

Why Yurchenko ultimately decided to return is another mystery. Says Colby, "There have been lots of defectors who have chosen to go home. There's nothing new about that." Even so, very rarely has someone as highly ranked as Yurchenko made the turnaround.

## One possible theory

A leading theory, provided by CIA officials, is that Yurchenko had a girlfriend in Canada, the wife of a Soviet diplomat, who he thought would also defect to be with him. When she refused, he despaired, began to miss his family, and tried to undo what was looking more and more like a big mistake.

Another possibility concerns Yurchenko's 16-year-old son, still in the Soviet Union. If Yurchenko was in fact allowed to move about a bit, it is not unlikely that Soviet officials "got to him," says one US intelligence official. "They could have said, 'If you stay in the US, your son has no career, no job, no future. If you come back and go around telling everyone that your experience in the West was horrible, we'll give your son a nice job, we'll give you an income, maybe a dacha somewhere.'"

Once such hypotheses as these are considered, the possibilities for intrigue become endless. Could Moscow have planned the whole enterprise? Could Yurchenko have been told to pretend to defect, give the West some important — but not vital — material, and then redefect, denouncing the CIA and proclaiming he was treated inhumanly?

Some, including President Reagan, suspect this might have happened. Colby, among others, doubts it, saying, "I don't think they'd use a senior officer for something like this."

If the Yurchenko affair was a ploy, the intent would have been twofold, said one former intelligence officer: "It would make the next guy who was planning to defect think twice before going. And it would make the United States less willing to believe his credentials if he did defect."

Interestingly, he said, even if the Yurchenko case was not a Soviet setup, the effect may be exactly the same.